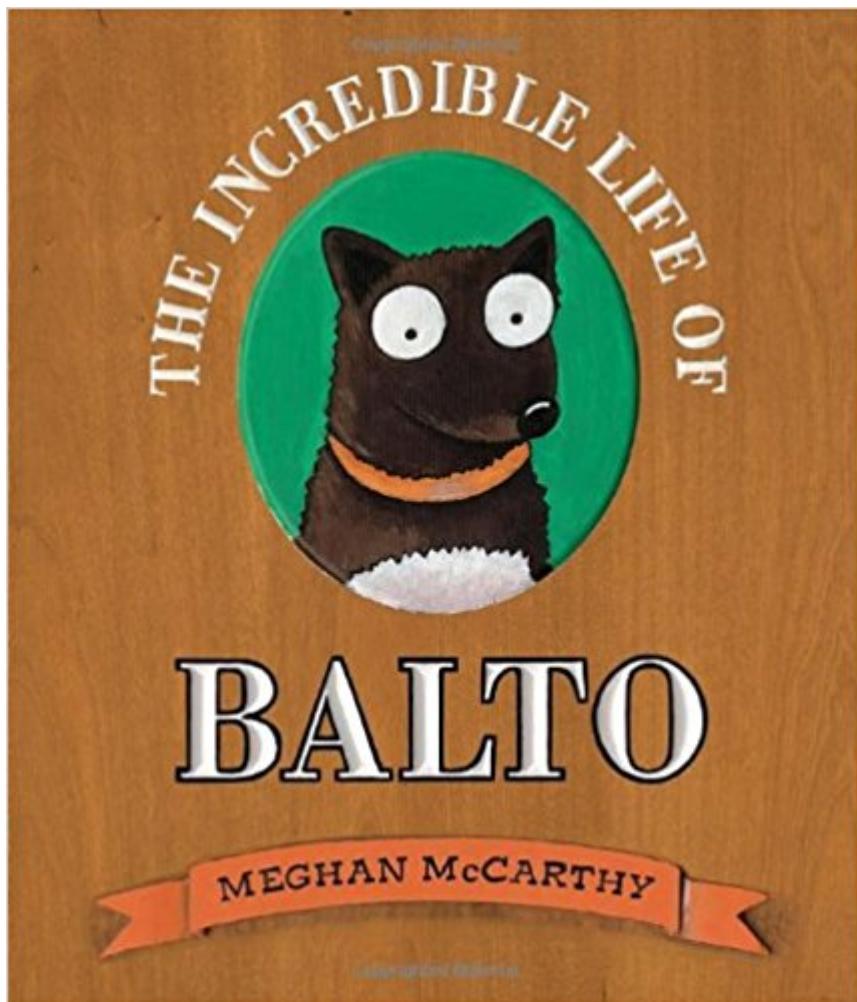


The book was found

The Incredible Life Of Balto



Synopsis

Most people know the story of Balto, the world famous dog who led his dogsled team through a blizzard to deliver a lifesaving serum to the stricken people of Nome, Alaska, in 1925. Balto shot to instant stardom—^a a company named dog food after him, a famous sculptor erected a statue of him that stands in Central Park to this day, and the dog even starred in his own Hollywood movie. But what happened to Balto after the hoopla died down? With a lively, informative text and humorous, vibrant illustrations, Meghan McCarthy captures the extraordinary life of Balto beyond his days as a celebrity.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 810L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 40 pages

Publisher: Knopf Books for Young Readers (August 9, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375844600

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Product Dimensions: 8.9 x 0.3 x 10.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,232,213 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #47 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Outdoor Recreation > Iditarod & Dog-Sledding #182 in Books > Children's Books > Sports & Outdoors > Winter Sports #979 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Winter Sports

Age Range: 3 - 7 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 2

Customer Reviews

MEGHAN McCARTHY is the author of several critically acclaimed nonfiction picture books, including *Aliens Are Coming! The True Account of the 1938 War of the Worlds Radio Broadcast*; *Strong Man: The Story of Charles Atlas*; and *Astronaut Handbook*.

This book for children suggests the heroism of a dog and how it led to the formation of the Iditarod each year. Younger kids would enjoy the story of a dog-hero.

I'm not a dog person. Like 'em fine. Don't see much particular need to interact with them on a

regular basis. Sometimes, though, I'll feel like my life as a children's librarian would have been easier if I had been a canine fanatic. A large swath of children's literature each year is dedicated to man's best friend. This year alone I've seen dogs traveling vast distances to be reunited with their loved ones (*A Dog's Way Home*), convince kids that they are transformed accountants (*The Ogre of Oglefort*), and even appear as gallons of orange juice (*When Life Gives You O.J.*). Nonfiction doggies proliferate as well but I can usually steer clear of them. Unless Meghan McCarthy is involved, of course. Then I'm going to have to see what all the fuss is about. In this particular case, Ms. McCarthy has taken what at first appears to be a well-known story then finds the lesser known tales lurking inside of it. The result is a biography that's bound to please dog lovers and dog neutrals (like myself) alike. The year: 1925. The place: Nome, Alaska. The problem: An epidemic of diphtheria was imminent and yet a horrible blizzard was preventing all incoming planes from delivering the much needed serum. The solution: Balto. Sled dogs, you see, were dispatched with the serum on board and Balto was at the head of one of these teams. When Balto's group missed the next team at the next checkpoint, they were lead onward by Balto until they got to Nome themselves. That's the story lots of people know. What is less well known is what happened next. Balto was celebrated throughout the States, appearing in movies, on dog food cans, and even earning a statue in Central Park. Sadly, he and his team went on the vaudeville circuit and ended up underfed and neglected. Yet surprisingly the good people of Cleveland banded together to purchase the brave dog and his sled mates. As a result he spent the remainder of his days running around the Brookside Zoo where he, "could relax and enjoy the rest of his life." The queen of the amusing nonfiction picture book for young readers, McCarthy's titles are always remarkable because they cover ground no one else does. Whether it's the invention of bubble gum or a false report of an alien invasion, McCarthy's titles are always wholly new. That's why I was so surprised by her choice to tackle Balto next. As real life heroic dogs go, Balto's pretty darn well known. Even had a terrible animated film based on his life (has any other real life heroic animal received such an honor?). Yet as it happens the choice to pursue his story after the well-known event was what sets this book apart from the pack (ho ho). By page twelve the book has covered the part of the tale that everyone knows. After that it's in brand new territory. The picture book biography is a strange beastie. Your readership, for one thing, consists of a wide range of ages. As a result, some authors figure that it's a good idea to play it safe. You want to tell an accurate story of the past, but you need to find a way of doing so that doesn't go into some of the more unpleasant details at length. In this particular case, the mistreatment of Balto and his fellow sled dogs. Sold to a man with a sideshow, McCarthy makes it clear that things look bad for Balto. Yet no one wants to look at abused animals in a picture

book, even if it is a true story. McCarthy's solution is twofold. In the text you actually don't hear anything about the abuse. All it says is that they were sold and "There Balto and the others were all but forgotten." Next, there are the pictures where McCarthy is careful to walk a fine line. She shows Balto and another dog against a gray background with thick chains attached to their collars. Balto's ears droop as he regards an upside down food dish, clearly empty. On the next page Balto watches as the man from Cleveland tries to do business with the sideshow owner. If you look at the dog, you'll notice that he's skinnier and mangier than he was in the past. McCarthy even gives one of his ears a half-cocked look, just to make the impression that all is not well. It's subtle, but in children's books sometimes you have to be subtle to be both honest and kid appropriate. Under normal circumstances I don't much care for reviewing a work of nonfiction, even a picture book, without seeing the backmatter first. The galley of Balto that I'm reviewing from does not have anything in the accompanying "Author's Note" at the end yet. Like I say, I usually find this to be a problem, but for Ms. McCarthy I will always make an exception. The reason for this has to do with her track record. By and large, when you pick up a Meghan McCarthy book you pick up a picture book work of nonfiction that has some of the finest end matter in the biz, be it a biography of a hawk, or the finer points of space travel. I once sat in on an American Library Association gathering of their Notables committee where they debated the various attributes of McCarthy's biography of Charles Atlas Strong Man. The endmatter in that particular book contained some fun exercises that kids could do on their own. Someone on the committee lamented, though, that there weren't any warning labels that kids could get hurt doing these exercises (which contained all the danger of your average sit-up). This was, to be blunt about it, an inane bone to pick with the book. Ms. McCarthy's Author's Notes do not suffer fools. So while I cannot tell you what this book will say in the end, I can at least rest assured in my own mind that whatever it contains, it should be well thought out, well researched, and interesting. But, as I say, I did not see it myself to be fair warned. A picture book work of nonfiction that reads like a picture book work of fiction is a valuable commodity. Subject matter is key, of course, as are intelligent illustrations that engage even as they inform. Meghan McCarthy's consistently high-quality works make her one of the best nonfiction picture book author/illustrators of the day. Imagine! Writing that's just as good as the art focusing on subjects everyone wants to know more about. Display this book and expect a hoard of kids who want to know more about the cute dog on the cover. Teaching history was never so easy. For ages 4 and up.

Any dog or man willing to risk life and limb to trek through snow and ice to bring medicine to the

town of Nome Alaska that has fallen to a case of diphtheria, deserves praise and honor of all sorts! That's what this book is about, specifically the lead dog Balto of all (or part) of just such an expedition that occurred in 1925. But, this book is more about the "what happened after" than the actual event. We learn about Balto's rise to fame, his fall from it, and what happens thereafter. I appreciate that McCarthy wanted to highlight the amazing adventure *after* the amazing adventure -- the incredible things that happened to Balto after the trek to Nome, and the effect his heroism had on people all over the country. But, I really do think there needed to be more emphasis on the actual trek to Nome - it felt too glossed over and I wanted more to learn just how brave these wonderful dogs and men really were. Plus, I think it would have made the "what came after" all the more powerful. In reading the interesting and informative back matter, McCarthy explains how she does research (akin to being "a detective") and how she discovered so many contradicting reports of the actual trek, the dogs and men that took part, and who deserved the credit. Because of this I wonder of that's one of the reasons she didn't spend much time on the actual adventure to Nome, but then, too, I wonder if there shouldn't have been more mention of the other dogs and men that were a part of it, too. I really liked McCarthy's inclusion of how muddied reports can get, and her ideas for fun activities kids can do to try it out -- a great introduction for kids to learn to analyze everything, and to know that everything is told through someone's perceptions. This back matter is definitely four or five stars! All in all the book is informative and interesting, but nothing that really captured me. I still love McCarthy's "Astronaut Handbook" best, but this story is still worth reading since it's based on actual events!

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